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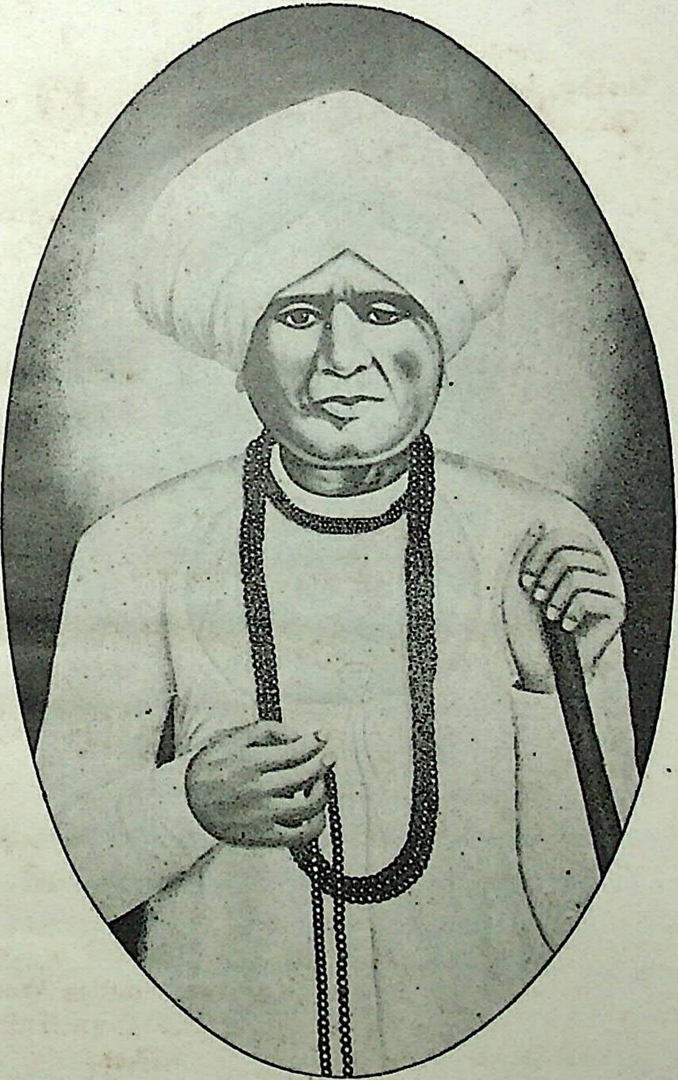

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Shri Jesukhlal Chhotalal Oza B. A. has translated this short life sketch of Bhakta Shri Jalaram in English. I first came in his contact in the year 1946 and since then I know him. He was a Karbhari of Vala and Vithalgadh States. During the British Regime he was an Assistant Secretary and Resident Magistrate at Baroda, After the formation of the State of Saurashtra. he served the Saurashtra Government and held many responsible post and recently retired as an Assistant Secretary and Controller of Rationing State of Saurashtra. He is a religious minded and God-fearing man. Out of sheer love for Shri Jalabapa, he gladly and willingly under-took to translate a life sketch of Bhakta Shri Jalaram into English. But for his efforts this translation would not have been done so early. For this act of kindness I am very much indebted to him and take this opportunity to convey my sincere thanks.

May Jalabapa give him long, healthy and happy life.

S. M. RAJDEV

Request.

Those who desire to know more about Biography and Miracles of Bhakta Shri Jalaram, may go through the 3rd Edition of Bhakta Shri Jalaram in Gujrati.

This new volume, having pucca leather binding and three coloured jacket, contains 811 pages, more than 40 coloured pictures, and hundreds of original letters of devotees. You should not miss the opportunity to read this Volume in this Iron-Age.

I

PERIOD OF CHILDHOOD.

In the Samvat Year 1856, on Kartik Sud Seventh, Monday, Jalaram was born at Virpur. His father's name was Pradhan Thakar and his mother's name was Rajbai. As he was born in Abhijit constellation, (Bhagwan Ramchandraji also was born in Abhijit) his name was kept as Jalaram according to astrological calculation. His parents were very pious and believed in the service of sadhus and saints. The birth of Jalaram was due to the blessings of a Saint, Raghuvirdasji who happened to come from Ayodhya (Bhagwan Ramchandraji's birth place). Pradhan Thakar was Lohana by caste and he had 3 sons, Bogharam, Jalaram and Devji and 3 daughters.

Jalaram was very bright from childhood. When he was young, a wonderful event took place which showed that he was a great yogi in his past birth. During his childhood, an old saint came to Virpur from Girnar and approaching the mother of Jalaram, said, "Mother, let me have the Darshan of your second son". The mother was wonderstruck and entreated the old saint to take food. At this time, child Jalaram who was playing outside came there and bowed to the saint. The saint asked "Well, child, do you recognize me". In response, the child Jalaram smiled and again bowed to the saint. Immediately the salutation was over, the saint disappeared. The mother looked perplexed. She remembered the blessing of Shri Raghuvirdasji and all her doubts were automatically dispelled. After this event, Jalaram was completely changed as if at the Darshan of the old Saint, he had a revelation of his past birth. He began to uttur the RAM MANTRA. Whether he rested or moved about however he was occupied, the Ram Mantra was always on his lips.

Jalaram, like other children, received only elementary education then imparted in village schools. At the age of 14, Jalaram was invested with the customory sacred thread and on completion of education, his betrothal was arranged by his father with Virbai, daughter of Thakar Pragji Somaiya of Atkot.

When Jalaram heard of his betrothal, he was much grieved. He approached his father and with all deference, he asked, "Father, why did you bind me to this worldly bondage ?" At this time, his uncle explained to him the sanctity of married life and its utility in realisation of God. Thereupon Jalaram kept quiet and said "Let Rama's will be done."

Jalaram was devoted to the services of Sadhus and saints, so much so that whenever any sadhu came, he would put aside all work, and take the sadhu to his house and supply him with food, clothes, and other things. When Jalaram was passing his days in this way, his marriage took place at the age of 16 years. He did not like to be tied down to matrimony but he yielded with a view to pleasing his father.

Pradhan Thakar belonged to the middle class and he was considerably annoyed at the charitable disposition of Jalaram who used to give away food and clothes to sadhus and saints. One day, he rebuked Jalaram and remonstrated with him that he should take into consideration the financial condition of the house. To this, Jalaram replied "Father, your advice is appropriate but I cannot act up to it. I shall not be able to refuse anything if anyone comes and asks for anything." Thereupon, the father asked Jalaram to live separate and told him "Jala, if you cannot act according to my advice, you cannot live with me. You separate and then give away anything in charity as you like. Jalaram obeyed his father and from that very day, he separated from his father.

Valjibhai, uncle of Jalaram came to know of this, and as he had no issue, and as he liked Jalaram, he found employment for him in his shop.

Mount Girnar being one of the famous places of pilgrimage, many sadhus and saints used to come to Virpur which is situated at a short distance of about 24 miles from Girnar. When sadhus came to Virpur, they begged alms and clothes from charitable people. The chief aim of Jalaram was to do good to all people and to help the needy and the poor to his utmost extent and worship God. One day in the early morning, when the merchants and tradesmen were opening their shops, a party of about 10 to 12 sadhus arrived in Virpur and they began to ask for alms from all shops. Such parties used to pass through Virpur on their way to Girnar and the religious minded merchants and people used to feed them. But as it was still early morning and the shops were hardly opened, no one paid heed to the party of sadhus asking for alms and the sadhus were much disappointed. One merchant however pointed out the shop of Jalaram and asked that they might go there and ask for whatever they wanted. Hearing this, the sadhus went to the shop of Jalaram.

At this time, Jalaram was cleaning and arranging goods in the shop. On seeing the sadhus, Jalaram welcomed them and asked them from where they came and what he could do to them. One old sadhu replied that they came from Gokul Mathura and they were on their way to Prabhas Patan and Girnar. He added that they desired to have all materials for sweet food and Guru Maharaj would bless him for the same.

On hearing this, Jalaram stopped doing shop work and replied with folded hands, "Maharaj, the sadhus may be allowed to go for bathing and you may wait here. I am arranging to supply you with all materials for sweet food as desired by you." The old Sadhu therefore allowed the party to go for bath and he sat down at the shop.

Jalaram was daily giving something to one or two sadhus and so one Bania merchant of the neighbouring shop was feeling that this Jalia would ruin the shop of his uncle by giving away articles in charity. This Bania therefore began to watch carefully as to what Jalaram was giving to the old sadhu.

Jalaram began to give flour, pulse, gur, rice, ghee etc. and in addition, gave one pot for ghee. He also gave about 10 cubits of cloth for packing the articles of food supplied by him. The old sadhu was very much pleased and as he was unable to carry all these articles alone, Jalaram closed the shop, took the pot of ghee and two lumps of gur in his hand and started to accompany the sadhu to the place where the sadhus had put up.

The neighbouring Bania merchant saw this and felt that Jalia would lead his uncle to bankruptcy. He thought a good opportunity had come to inform Valjibhai and he therefore went straight to Valjibhai and apprised him about the way in which Jalaram had given away all food materials etc., to the sadhus exaggerating the matters as much as he could. Uncle Valjibhai was furiously enraged on hearing what the Bania merchant narrated and at once started for the place where the sadhus had put up, accompanied by the Bania merchant and a few other persons who had assembled there.

At a little distance, they saw the Sadhu Maharaj and Jalaram going with a bundle of food articles. Uncle Valjibhai lost his temper at this sight and cried out "Jalia, halt". Hearing the uncle's cry, Jalaram was terrified and felt that his uncle would punish him for his action. He stood still and began to pray to God. The uncle approached him and asked "what is there in the bundle".

"Uncle, what else can there be in the bundle except cow-dung cakes," replied Jalaram hesitatingly.

"Do not be wise" Tell the truth. Open the Bundle" said the uncle adding that the Bania merchant had told him everything.

Obeying the order of the uncle, Jalaram opened the bundle and, to the astonishment of all, who were present, the bundle was found to contain only the cow-dung cakes. The defeated Bania merchant said "Uncle, look into the pot."

Jalaram intervened and replied, "Uncle the pot contains water."

"Let me see", said the uncle and taking the pot in hand, he looked into it and found that it contained water. All others also saw and found that the pot contained pure water. The pot was bent a little and a stream of pure water fell on the ground.

All present felt that the Bania merchant was wrong and he had misled Valjibhai. The Bania merchant had however seen flour, pulse, rice, ghee etc., being actually given and he felt that it was through magic done by the old saint that only cow-dung cakes and water were found. He therefore told all to go to the shop and make sure about it.

The uncle told Jalaram to go with the old Sadhu and then to return soon to the shop. He also began to reprimand the Bania merchant when the merchant said "Valjibhai, about 10 cubits of cloth has been given from whole piece of cloth and if it is measured, the truth will come out." On reaching the shop, the uncle measured the whole piece of cloth in the presence of all and not an inch of cloth was found short. All who had assembled severely rebuked the Bania merchant.

Jalaram returned to the shop after handing over the bundle of foodgrains and pot of ghee to the Sadhus' party. The sadhus prepared sweet-balls and ate them with pleasure and shouted, "Jalia - ki - Jai". This incident opened the "inner eye" of Jalaram. He realised the omnipresence of God and the curtain of ignorance was raised. After this incident, Jalaram was unable to pay proper attention to the shop work and he began to feel disgusted with worldly affairs. One day, his uncle asked as to why he remained dejected. Jalaram replied that he wished to go on a pilgrimage. Looking to the tender age and difficulties involved in pilgrimage his uncle advised him to postpone the idea for about 2 or 3 years. But as Jalaram continued to remain uneasy, his uncle and his father gave their consent. Jalaram thereupon started on a pilgrimage and returned home after about one and half years. He visited Mathura, Ayodhya, Benares, Gayaji, Jagannath, Rameshwar and other holy places of pilgrimage. At this time, Jalaram was only eighteen. Virbai, wife of Jalaram was of a good nature, pious and self - sacrificing and her goal in life was service and devotion to her husband.

After his return, Jalaram thought of having a spiritual guide (Guru). He went to Fatehpur, near Amreli, where saint Bhojalram was residing. He took "secret advice" i. e. Guru Mantra from

Saint Bhojalram and became his disciple. He requested his Guru to give him permission to open an "Annakshetra" (daily distribution of food to the hungry). Guru Bhojalramji was very much pleased and replied "Jala, you have my blessings. Open Annakshetra. Continue your married life and serve the sadhus. The Almighty God will fulfil your desires. Your wants will ever be fulfilled. Go, this is my heart's blessings."

II

OPENING OF "ANNAKSHETRA"

Having thus obtained the blessings from Guru Bhojalramji, Jalaram opened a centre for daily distribution of food to the mendicants, beggars, sadhus etc., at Virpur on Maha Sud 2nd of Samvat 1876. Before commencing this daily distribution of food to the hungry, Jalaram had separated from his father and uncle. He sent for his wife who was at her father's house.

When Jalaram started a separate house for himself, not only had he no cash with him but the house was lacking in usual articles of daily use. In such circumstances Jalaram and his wife used to go to the fields for reaping corns and they maintained themselves on whatever grains they received from their labour. By such labour, they collected 40 maps (1 map equal to 14 seers and 1 seer equal to 40 tolas) of foodgrains and on the strength of this stock, Jalaram started the "Annakshetra". At this time, he was 20 years of age.

In those days, there were no railways in Kathiawar and Virpur was a central place for going to Junagadh, Somnath etc. So the Annakshetra at Virpur, proved to be a blessing to all travellers and pilgrims. The first person who came for alms was a sadhu. He gave one idol of Bal Mukund to Jalaram and said, "O Bhagat, worship this idol with all your heart and love, and God will give you all prosperity." He also added that there was an idol of Hanumanji buried in the house and that on the third day, Hanumanji will give Darshan.

According to the blessings of this Sadhu, idol of Hanumanji manifested itself on the third day in the Ashram and gave Darshan. A temple was built on the same spot and the idols of Bal Mukund and Hanumanji were installed there with special religious rites. Jalaramji began to worship these deities regularly.

As the news about the institution of the Annakshetra spread, a large number of sadhus and saints began to come to Virpur. Only in about a month's time, the small stock of foodgrains which Jalaram and his wife had collected by their labour in the fields was exhausted in the daily alms giving. Jalaram remained occupied in giving alms and in worshipping Bal Mukundji and Hanumanji and hardly got time for going out for labour. He was not however disappointed and continued to give sadavrat with full trust in God.

After the commencement of the Annakshetra, people of Virpur and surrounding villages began to take vows in the event of their sickness or other difficulties, and by the Grace of God, such sickness and difficulties disappeared and on fulfilment of the vows, people began to send corns to the temple of Jalabapa. God is great, Out of His great love for his servants, He enable them to accomplish their aims. In this case too, God was kind and the Annakshetra prospered.

In Samvat 1881, the then Thakore Saheb Shri Muluji II assigned 2 Santis of land, one vadi and certain other levies to Bhakta Shri Jalaram having regard to his devotion to God and the Annakshetra opened by him.

The then Maharaja Saheb of Gondal was also much pleased with Jalaram's worship and used to attend to his Bhajans. Being attracted by saintliness of Bhakta Jalaram, the Maharaja Saheb started "Sadavrat" at his own cost at village Charakhdi in the name of the Bhaktraj.

The Nawab Saheb of Junagadh and the Maharaja Sahebs of Gondal and Dhrangadhra had personal experience of miraculous powers of Jalaram and they pursuaded him to accept land and villages for his temple but Jalaram did not accept any such offer saying "Of what use is land and villages to saints and Sadhus ! Whatever piece of bread Ram gives should be distributed to the hungry and God be Worshipped."

Bhakta Shri Jalaram was blessed by the Divinity presiding over the articles of food. He was being entreated to visit villages and when the devotees heard of the Bhakta's visit they assembled in great number. Naturally, on such occasions, those engaged in feeding the assembly, felt that food will not suffice, but Jalaram would go to the place where the food was cooked and after offering his prayers, with Ghee, light and Tulsi leaf, he would say "now begin to serve and God will do good." His prayers were answered and food for 50 was sufficient for 500.

Six months after the commencement of the Annakshetra, Harji, a tailor in Virpur suffered from abdominal pain. He tried various medicines but the pain continued. One day, Ruda Patel told the tailor "Brother Harji, you give up all the medicines. Bhagat Jalaram resides in our village. He distributes food to the hungry out of the earnings of his labour. Go, take his shelter and obtain his blessings. You will be cured."

Harji, who was tired of medicines, took a vow as if in the presence of Jalaram saying "O, Jalabhagat, if I am cured of my pain, I shall give 5 maps (1 map equal to 14 seers) of corn in the Annakshetra."

By the Grace of God, Harji's pain began to subside from that very day and in a week's time, pain completely disappeared. Harji immediately went to Jalaram with promised corn and said "Bapa, I tried various medicines but failed. I then took a vow in your name and I am cured. You are my father". The Bhaktraj replied, "Brother, all this was due to Ram's Grace. I know nothing in the matter. My work is to worship God and feed the hungry." After this, the fame of Jalaram spread far and wide.

People came to have faith in him. They praised his Charity and kindness and entertained a high regard for him.

Jalaram maintained himself by manual labour. In day time, he used to go for work and at night he continued his worship. His wife, Virbai used to cook and feed the mendicants who came to the Ashram. Daily routine went on in this way. It was sometimes felt that due to rush of mendicants, corn will not suffice but under some indescribable and inaccessible divine force, the daily alms giving continued and no want was actually perceived. Two years passed in this way when another miracle happened.

In Virpur, the only son of one Jamal Ghanchi, aged 10 years, fell sick. Jamal tried all means at his disposal and also took several vows but all went in vain. Jamal lost all hopes for his son's life. Being thus disappointed, one day he was going to the Bazar for medicine. On the way, Harji Tailor met him. Harji asked Jamal about his son's health and inquired as to why he looked so defeated. Jamal replied that he had lost all hope for his son's life and so saying, he began to weep. Harji consoled Jamal and advised him to approach Jalaram for his blessing. Jamal took a vow on the spot saying "O Jalaram, I have no hope about my son's life. However, if he will once open his eyes and look towards me, I shall give 40 maps of corn to your Ashram."

A miracle happened and the same night, Jamal's son opened eyes and asked for something to eat. Jamal was overjoyed. He gave his son something to eat. He took 40 maps of grains in a cart and went straight to Jalaram's ashram. He prostrated himself before Jalaram and began to weep. Bhakta said "well Jamal, what is the matter. You have brought corn for the ashram and why do you weep? Jamal was overjoyed and could not stop weeping. The Bhakta consoled him and asked him to say what the difficulty was. Jamal replied "Bapa, my son was in the jaws of death. There was no hope for his life. All medicines were tried and failed. Several vows were taken but there was no hope of my son's survival. Harji asked me to take a vow in your name and immediately after I took this vow, my son asked for water and food and I am now convinced that he will recover. O Bhakta I had taken a vow to give only 40 maps of grain but I now give to your Ashram these 40 maps of foodgrains, the cart, the pair of bullocks and also the mod (a thick course cloth in which corn is packed.) O Jalla, what Allah did not give, you gave. You are my Allah from today. So saying, Jamal added "Jala is Allah. Whom Allah may not give, Jala can give." Jamal bowed again and again to Jalaram and then returned to his house. It needs no mention that Jamal's son survived and enjoyed a long life.

After this incident, the Bhaktraj who was already popularly known, as "Bapa" came to be regarded as "Godman" and in Samvat 1878, people began to believe that "Jala was Allah".

It came to be believed that the Goddess Annapurna was at his bidding and he never lacked food for poor. Charity increased and charity alone constituted the creed of the Bhakta. To him, the great truth embodied in Kabir's famous lines "Pray to Almighty and feed the poor" was the guiding principle of his life.

To feed to hungry irrespective of caste, creed or religion was his daily task. He regarded all with the same kindness - The Shikhs, Muslems, the Sadhu or the Grahasthi, man or beast. He took very great care to relieve the hunger and fatigue of all around him. He understood the essence of such charity and put it into practice. This was his creed, devotion or penance - call it what you will. The scriptures point out that a child in the womb, born living creature, child, young, old, deities, demons or ascetics - all require food for maintenance. Hunger is the greatest disease to all living creatures and food is the only remedy for it. Distribution of food to the poor and hungry is the highest and noblest form of charity.

The law of piety and religion proclaimes that one who gives food in charity gets renown in this world and happiness in the other.

Saint Jalaram began to acquire all supernatural powers and he came to acquire the power of "Inexhaustability". To whatever vessel he touched, the vessel became inexhaustable and mendicants never lacked food.

Either as a result of this accomplishment or due to peoples' full faith in Jalaram, the store room of sadavrat always remained full of grains. People used to take vows for one reason or other and on their wishes being fulfilled, they used to send cart - loads of corn to the Bhakta's ashram. In this respect, the Ashram also received good support from various states.

It was a very hard task to cook and feed all but Virbai was as religious and pious as Jalaram. She performed all the work with sincere enthusiasm and she never felt fatigued. All common people were wonder-struck at the pains which this couple was taking. Grinding corn was the most difficult task. It was not possible to grind so much corn with hand mills and for this purpose, outside labour had to be engaged. The necessity for having a big grinding mill to cope with the work of grinding large quantities of foodgrains was being felt in the Ashram, when one incident happened which unmistakably testified to Jalaram's saintliness and renunciation.

The Maharaja Saheb of Dhrangadhra was going on a pilgrimage to Prabhas Patan accompanied by a large number of followers. When the advance party reached the confines of Virpur, Jalabapa approached them and said "Brethern, you cannot go without taking Ram's Prashad." So saying, he began to distribute 2 sweet balls and a handful of "Ganthias" to each man of the party which consisted of 150 mounted Police, out of the 2 baskets. Though he served all, the 2 baskets remained full. On seeing this miracle, one of the mounted Police returned at once to the Maharaja Saheb who was still at some distance and reported the whole incident to the Maharaja. The Maharaja Saheb was wonder - struck and he told the mounted police - man that he might be labouring under some illusion. The Maharaja Saheb, however moved on towards Virpur and reached the confines of Virpur. He saw Jala Bhagat sitting in the confines, with one basket full of sweet balls and one basket full of "Ganthias". As soon as the Maharaja Saheb reached the place where Jala Bhagat was sitting, the latter approached the Maharaja Saheb and with folded hands spoke "Bapu, Junagadh is still far away. Proceed after taking Ram's Prashad." The Maharaja Saheb replied, "Bhagat, Junagadh is not very far. We shall soon reach there and we have with us a large retinue. "The Bhagat replied that the party could not proceed further without taking Ram's Prashad and so saying, Jala Bapa began to serve sweet - balls and Ganthias from the baskets to each of the retinue consisting of 250 mounted Police - men. The Maharaja Saheb personally saw this miracle. He folded his hands before the Bhagat and requested him to stop. The Maharaja Saheb told the Bhagat "Ask for anything you like. What should I give you." In reply, the Bhagat said, with folded hands, "Bapu, there is no miracle in this. Ram gave his Prashad to all." The Maharaja Saheb again said, "It is true that this is Ram's Prashad. But ask for anything you want and I shall not proceed further without giving you what you want."

Jala Bapa when entreated like his, said "Bapu, what can I ask from you? This is all due to Ram's favour. I am giving flour to mendicants but outturn of flour from hand mill is small and outside labour has to be engaged to produce the required quantity of flour. In your State, there are good stones for making a grinding mill and some stones may be sent to me for a grinding mill." The Maharaja Saheb replied, "Well Bhagat, is this all you need? You ought to have asked for some village or Giras. I again request you to ask for. Build a temple in my State and I shall assign giras for its maintenance." The Bhagat said with folded hands, "Bapu, saints and Sadhus should not aspire to have giras or village or worldly goods. They should not be land-lords. Their duty is to worship God and to distribute freely whatever God gives.

The Maharaja Saheb was extremely pleased with the saintliness of the Bhagat. He bowed to the Bhagat, placed a sum of rupees at his feet and proceeded towards Junagadh. When he returned to Dhrangadhra after completing the pilgrimage, he arranged to send the best stones to the Bhagat's Ashram. He also sent from Dhrangadhra experts for constructing a grinding mill. The mill was accordingly constructed. This mill is still in existence at the Ashram. It is worked by bullocks and the daily outturn of flour is 15 maunds.

The Nawab Saheb of Junagadh had also personal experience of this divine power of Bhakta

Jalaram. The Bhaktaraj stood the test. The Nawab Saheb entreated the Bhaktraj to come to his state and persuaded him to accept Giras and villages. The village "Rabarika" was offered to the Bhaktraj in charity but Jalaram refused to accept the village. He had no liking for worldly goods. The Nawab Saheb was much pleased with the selfless-ness of Jalaram and he assigned to the "Bapa's Ashram" a portion of the revenues of village Gundala. Though more than 100 years have passed since then, the portion of the revenues of Gundala assigned to the Ashram continues to be paid to the Ashram till now. Thus the goddess of plenty was favouring the Bhaktraj and the Annakshetra was receiving help from the States. The Bhaktraj was devoting more and more time in meditation of God.

Though the Princes were honouring and favouring Bhaktraj, he remained humble. He did not crave for worldly honour nor did his reputation make him proud. He had everything that can turn a man's head - honour, wealth youth, a young and loving wife and an obedient daughter. A born yogi, he was not affected by any of these.

About ten years had passed since the commencement of the Annakhestra. The fame of Bhaktraj was spreading far and wide.

III

TRIAL OF THE BHAKTRAJ.

A day dawned for the trial of Bhaktraj Jalaram. In Samvat year 1886, one day, an old Mahatma (saint) came to the Ashram and immediately on reaching, cried out "Where is Jala Bhagat?"

Jalaram was personally feeding certain sadhus and mendicants in the store house of the Ashram. On hearing the saint's cry, Jalaram came out of the store house and bowed to the old saint with folded hands.

The old saint gave his blessings. The old saint was then made to sit down and offered meals. The saint however did not accept the invitation and he began to go away with his "Joli and Dhoka".

The Bhaktraj then said, "O Maharaj no sadhus or saints coming to this Ashram go without food. Why do you go away like this? We shall not be able to take food if you leave the Ashram without taking food." So saying, the Bhaktraj stood still before the old saint with folded hands. The old saint however stuck obstinately to his refusal to take food and said, "I want to go to the Girnar and I have come here hearing your reputation." So saying, the old saint fell on the ground owing to his old age, speaking "Narayan, Narayan."

The Bhaktraj at once assisted the saint in getting up, began to nurse him and again entreated him to take food. Inspite of all these entreaties, the old saint did not come to any conclusion about taking food. The Bhaktraj was much partubed at the obstinacy of the old saint. It was his habit to take food only after the saints and sadhus took their food at the Ashram.

The Bhaktraj with all deference again requested the old saint to take food and added that he should pardon Jalaram if anything had offended him.

The saint did not still give any reply. Thereupon the Bhaktraj told the old saint that if he did not wish to take food, he might ask for anything he wanted and he would give it even at the risk of his head. The saint looked towards the Bhaktraj with steady eyes but did not utter any word.

The Bhaktraj then asked, "O, saint Mahatma, if you have no objection, tell us from where you have come and where you are going."

To this, the old saint replied " I am coming from Gokul Mathura. It is not decided where to go." So saying, the saint began to move away. The Bhaktraj again folded his hands and earnestly requested the saint to go only after taking food.

The saint replied that he might be allowed to go as he had no desired to take food.

The Bhaktraj replied, "If you do not want to take food, tell me what you want."

The old saint replied, "O Bhagat, let me go. After my coming here, I do not feel well. I cannot speak. What can I ask from you? Will you give what I ask for? Jalaram, think over the matter. It is easy to tell me to ask for anything but it is difficult to fulfil the promise given. I feel that my wish will not be fulfilled here. I may be allowed to go. Narayan, Narayan, Narayan."

The Bhaktraj replied, "Of what use is this body if it cannot be used in the service of saints and sadhus? I am ready to give whatever you ask for.".

"Jalaram", said the saint, "Will you give what I ask for? "Most willingly" replied Jalaram. "Here then", spoke old saint. "This old age is very bad. Old and infirm body cannot walk properly, cannot do work and I am tired with old age. So, if you give me your wife to serve me, God will bless you." So, saying, the old saint spoke "Narayan, Narayan." and winked at Jalaram.

On hearing this demand, Jalaram bowed to the feet of the old saint and said, "Well. Maharaj, I grant your request." So, saying, Jalaram called his wife Virbai who was at that time preparing meals for sadhus and mendicants in the store-house. When Virbai came out at the call, Jalaram spoke to her as under: "Bhandari, (store keeper) This old saint Mahatma is asking for your servivices to nurse him in his old age."

Virbai replied, "Prabhu, what is there to ask me in this matter. You are my husband and your wishes should be respected by me as those of God. Please tell me what is your command."

Jalaram replied, "O, good lady, it is our sacred duty to serve and nurse saints and sadhus. This old saint is like our father. So go with him and nurse him."

"As you desire", replied Virbai and so saying, she bowed at the feet of the old saint.

This matter immediatety began to be discussed in the Ashram. Some began to say that the old saint was an arrogant rogue, many others began to hate such conduct of Jalaram. Information was sent to the Thakore Saheb that a saint had come to the Ashram and at his request, Jalaram had given away his wife to the saint.

On hearing this news, the Thakore Saheb felt that Jalaram may continue the work of charity but he cannot give away his wife in this way. The Thakore Saheb at once came to the Ashram and found Jalaram, his wife and the old saint sitting. Jalaram welcomed the Thakore Saheb and told him as to why he took the trouble of coming to the Ashram. The Thakore Saheb replied, "Well Bhagat, Have I been correctly informed about giving of your wife." Jalaram replied, "Yes, Bapu, this old saint asked for the services of Bhandari to tend and nurse him due to his old age. It is my duty to satisfy the wishes of such saints and sadhus. What more am I doing in this? I am discharging my duty and my God is All-powerful to preserve my credit."

The Thakore Saheb tried to pursuade Jalaram but the latter replied that he was merely doing his duty and requested the Thakore Saheb not to dissuade him from doing his duty.

Hearing this reply of Jalaram, the Thakore Saheb and others were helpless. Religious minded people took this event as a divine sign.

Virbai bowed to Jalaram and said, "Maharaj I may be pardoned if I have committed any mistake, I am now being separated from you. Bhaktraj, I have never hurt your feelings, but however, if ever there was any occasion on which I did not act according to your wishes, I may be pardoned for it." With these words, she burst into tears. Bhaktraj began to console her: "O my true wife," you have this day discharged your proper duty, and there is nothing in this action of yours which may be unbecoming to you or to your family as you obeyed my word as the word of the Lord.

"Think no more of me and serve this old Mahatma with true faith. I can say no more." And he bowed to the old saint Mahatma, and said, "Is there anything you desire more." No nothing, Jalaram. God will bless you. Narayan, Narayan, :"So saying the old saint left the Ashram accompanied by Virbai.

The old Saint and Virbai began to proceed in the northern direction of Virpur and reached one dense forest at a distance of about 2-3 miles from Virpur on the bank of river Sariyamati. Here the old saint, said "Sati, I am going to answer a call of nature. You sit here. Keep this "Joli and Dhoka" and donot hand over to anyone till I return." Virbai replied, "Maharaj, come back as soon as possible." "Do not worry about it, Sati," replied the old saint, "I shall soon return" So saying, the old saint, handed over "Joli and Dhoka" to Virbai and disappeared into the forest.

The Sun had already set and it was getting dark. The old saint, however, did not return and

Virbai grew uneasy and began to weep. At this time, Virbai heard a divine utterance in the sky, saying "Sati, Sati, I congratulate you on your devotion to your husband and on your will-power. I had come to test you and you have very successfully passed the test. So now you go back to your house. "The Joli and Dhoka" given by me to you may be kept as my emblems in your Ashram and worshipped regularly. Sati, I again congratulate you and your husband. "Hearing this divine utterance, Virbai was surprised and she began to offer prayers to God.

When this news reached the village, a large number of people assembled and went to the forest to bring back Virbai. Virbai was brought back to the Ashram with all religious pomp. The "Joli and Dhoka" were then duly installed in the Asram. These 2 emblems are still in Jalaram's Ashram and they are being worshipped every day morning and evening. Jalaram offered his prayers to God, saying, "O God, your ways and powers are inscrutable. One can pass through your test only if you are gracicus to him." At this time, Jalaram's age was only 30 years.

After this incident, the fame of saint Jalaram spread all round. His devotees began to know him as "God-like." In Gujarat, Kathiawr, and even in foreign countries, vows began to be taken in the name of Jalaram. By the Grace of God, the vows taken by these devotees began to be fulfilled and the number of devotees increased considerably. Jalaram's fame spread so far that it became a common saying. "Jala is Allah and became known as "Virpur of Jala Bhagat."

IV

SAINTLINESS OF JALARAM.

People from various parts of the country now began to come to the Ashram of Jalaram for redress of their maladies or difficulties. Many men became his disciples and established him as their "Guru."

Those who had faith, knew Jalaram as a saint but there were Scepties who considered him as a cheat. Such people used to harrass Jalaram. Such a man was Tilio, a Lohana, of Virpur who often reviled the Bhaktraj. Whenever he happened to meet Jalaram, he cut a joke and said, "Bhagat, you are worshipping God daily. You are feeding the hungry sadhus and mendicants. Will a celestial chariot come for you?" To this, Saint Jalaram used to reply, "Well Brother, celestial chariot will certainly come." In reply, Tiliyo used to say, "Bhagat, when the celestial chariot comes, I may be informed. Take me with you when you go in a celestial chariot."

The Bhaktraj's reply to this was that he would positively inform him when the chariot would come. Tiliyo used to tell the people that Jalaram is mad, no Chariot would come. He is maintaining himself by labour . and whatever he earns by labour he gives away to Sadhus and mendicants. He has no other capacity to earn his bread and so he is pretending to be a Bhagat."

People often tested Jalaram's devotion to God but Jalaram successfully passed these tests as he was a sincere devotee of God and as he had dedicated himself, soul and body, to the service of God.

Thus the envious people did not succeed in reviling the Bhagat. One Gopal Joshi who was a Saraswat Brahmin by caste, tried Jalaram and then became his disciple. Gopal Joshi was suffering from paralysis for the last 15 years. He could neither speak nor work nor walk and was thus tired of his life. At this juncture, he came to hear of Jalaram as a saint and a true devotee of God. Gopal Joshi was a learned Brahmin and he thought of approaching pious Jalaram who had a 'Darshan' of God. Gopal Joshi accordingly came to Jalaram's ashram at Virpur and bowed to the Bhaktraj. The Bhaktraj had very great respect for Brahmins and if any Brahmin ever bowed to him, he would request Brahmin to stop and he would respect him by going round the Brahmin four times and then allow him to go.

When the Bhaktraj came to know that Gopal Joshi who bowed to him was a family priest of Lohana and a learned man, he was much grieved. He at once approached Gopal Joshi, took four rounds about him and bowed to him saying, "Maharaj, one should bow to God only I am an ordinary man to whom there should be no bowing. Please tell me why you are adding one sin to me by bowing. Gopal Joshi was much pleased with this politeness of the Bhaktraj and he replied, "Bhaktraj, devotees of God deserve to be bowed." Gopal Joshi then told the Bhaktraj about his oilment of paralysis and requested him to show some remedy for the disease. In reply, Jalaram said, "Maharaj, what remedy can I have? My work is to feed the hungry and worship God. You may stay here and worship Shri Ram and feed the sadhus and saints.

As desired by Bhakta Jalaram, Gopal Joshi began to reside in the Ashram and pass his time in worship of Shri Ram and in feeding the Sadhus etc. Hardly six months had passed in this way when one day, paralysis of Gopal Joshi disappeared. His tongue which was stammering for the last 15 years became clear and faultless. Gopal Joshi was now able to speak freely and fluently.

One day he sat before the image of Ram and began to sing the following prayer :

"O Lord Jalaram of the poor, take care of me with your Divine Power."

On hearing the prayer being sung by Gopal Joshi, Jalaram came there running and said, "Joshi please stop, and don't praise me! If you will now recite any more prayers describing my virtues you will again be what you were."

Joshi at once stopped reciting the prayer. Jala Bapa did not like to here his praises.

Joshi's paralysis was completely cured and he then returned to his house.

The Bhaktraj now had the reputation of curing incurable diseases. In village Khokhri, near Virpur, one disciple of Bhaktraj had a wife who contracted some eye diesease and became blind. Some non-belivers approached Jalaram and told him "Bhaktraj, your disciple's wife has gone blind. You have acquired superhuman powers. Cure her eyes by your powers." To this, the Bhaktraj replied with great politeness, "Brethern, Rama's name is my Divine Power. I know nothing else. Pray to God and He will do what He likes."

All assembled at night and offered prayers. In the morning, to the astonishment of all, the eyes of the disciple's wife were found cured and she got vision. Those who were non-believers and envious of Jalaram were all amazed. They all bowed to the Bhaktraj and then dispersed.

Many people of Nawagam, a village near Jasdan suffered from guinea-worm. The best physicians were tried but they failed. Some one got an inspiration that Jalaram was an accomplished saint and his blessings might be obtained. So, 3-4 leading merchants and Patels of Nawagam came to Virpur. They bowed to the Bhaktraj and said, "O Bhaktraj, you are God-like and accomplished. Take mercy on our village and free us from the scorge of guinea-worm?"

The Bhaktraj replied, "Well, Brethern, I have got nothing with me except a rosary of "Ram-Nam." By the grace of the Almighty God, your misfortune will be removed."

So saying, the Bhaktraj began to pray to God, saying "Oh Ram, I entreat you with folded hands and sincere heart to save the people of Nawagam from the disease of "guinea-worm." You are all powerful." God is bound by the love of his devotees as He himself has said.

By the Grace of God, the disease of guinea-worm disappeared from Nawagam within 4 days and those who were actually suffering from guinea-worm were also cured of it. The people of Nawagam were very happy at this miraculous cure and they began to invite the Bhaktraj to their houses. Many became his disciples. Many decided to present a portion of their income at the feet of Jala Bapa. The whole village become the follower of Bhakta Jalaram. Even at present, that village is known by the name of Jala Bhagat's Nawagam.

In Samvat 1917, Bhaktraj Jalaram had been to Jodiya. The breadth of the river at Jodia was causing great difficulty to the people of Jodiya. The flow of water was on the opposite side and women and other people going to fetch water had to cross the breadth which was very trouble-some.

When Bhaktraj was leaving Jodiya, people of the village accompanied him upto the river to bid farewell and while crossing the breadth of the river, one man of Jodiya explained to Bhaktraj the difficulty which the people experienced in crossing the breadth while going to fetch water. Hearing this, Bhaktraj offered his prayers saying, "O Ram, kindly remove this difficulty of the people of Jodiya for ever." So saying, the Bhaktraj left Jodiya. In the monsoon, the water course of the river changed by the Grace of God. Love on the part of devotees makes the fulfilment of all their desires. The difficulty of the people was removed. Jala Bapa's prayers were granted. Even at present, the flow of water in the river runs at the changed place.

One Kala Raiyani of Virpur dedicated his only son aged 10 years at the feet of the Bhaktraj and begged of him to accept the boy as a disciple. The Bhaktraj replied that he was only an ordinary man and refused to accept the boy as a disciple. One sadhu Mahatma was present at that time and he said, "Well, Bhagat, you should not refuse to accept the boy as a disciple. Remember the Almighty and accept the boy as disciple." The Bhaktraj thought that the wishes of the Mahatma should be respected. He accordingly accepted the son of Kala Raiyani as his disciple and said, "Just as the boy is your only son, he is my only disciple. Whenever any difficulty arises, come to me at any time. "Kala Raiyani replied, "Bhagat, the boy is now your disciple. It is now for you to look after him in future." "God will protect him" said the Bhaktraj and Kala and his son then returned to their house.

About 10 years had passed since then. Kala's son had now attained the age of about 20 years and he was doing agricultural work. One day, he fell sick with a pain in the abdomen and died after a short illness of 4-5 hours. This blow was too heavy for his father Kala and on seeing his son's death, he fainted. All relatives assembled and gave consolation to Kala. Bier was prepared and the dead body of Kala's son was placed on the Bier for carrying to the burning ground. One of the relatives said, "Well, Kala Raiyani, your son was a disciple of Bhagat Jalaram and the Bhagat had said that he might be remembered if any calamity overtook him. So, the Bhaktraj may be informed about the death of your son.

Kala replied, "what is the use of informing the Bhagat and giving him unnecessary trouble. He will come to know of the said death in the morning." But the relative was not satisfied with Kala's reply, and started for the Bhagat's Ashram to inform the Bhagat of what had happened. It was about 4 a. m. He knocked the doors of the Ashram. Bhaktraj was taking his bath at that time. When he came out of bath, he was informed about the death of Kala's son. The Bhagat replied, "Ram Ram, this is a very sad news. Well, Brothern, I am just coming after completing God's worship. I want to see the boy once with my own eyes. The boy was my disciple. He may not be taken away to the burning ground before my arrival." The relative returned to Kala's house and told him that the Bhaktraj was just coming. He also asked others not to take the bier to the burning ground before the arrival of the Bhaktraj. In the meanwhile the Bhaktraj arrived at Kala's house and said, "Brothern, this is as Ram wished. But let me see the face of my disciple once." Some-one from the mourners spoke, "Bapa, the bier is ready and the dead body is already tied to it. What is the use of untieing the body ?"

The Bhaktraj replied, "Well, you may not untie the body but atleast remove the covering from the face so that I can see the face. Give me an opportunity to see my disciple. No one could disregard the wishes of Bhaktraj and the covering was accordingly removed. The Bhaktraj looked at the face and said, "Well Govinda, why are you sleeping like this ? Look at me."

As soon as the Bhaktraj uttered these words, Govind opened one eye and looked at his Guru the Bhaktraj. The Bhaktraj smiled and again said, "Govind, Get up." At this, Govind opened his both eyes and spoke, "Why am I tied like this? Release me."

On hearing this, all went mad with joy. The body was immediately untied. Govind at once got up and fell at the feet of the Bhaktraj. All bowed to the Bhaktraj. Kala Raiyani's joy knew no bounds.

The place which was full of lementations and sorrow a few minutes before was in no time converted into a place of joy. The Bhaktraj then took the leave of all and returned to his Ashram.

Govind at once closed the doors of his house and informed all that he would not allow them to go without taking food. The mourners explained to him that they had come for mourning and they could not take food before bathing and they might therefore be allowed to go. But Govind was firm and at his insistence, all stayed for food.

The main door of the house was closed. From the back door, sweetmeats and sev got prepared at a confectioner's shop were brought in. At this juncture, the Bhaktraj came back and asked Govind to open the door. When Govind opened the door, he saw that the Bhaktraj had arrived with a multitude of 200 persons.

Food was prepared for about 50 persons only. To this were added the 200 men who came with the Bhakraj and a few more. In all, the number of persons present went to about 300. Kala Raiyani was perplexed and he did not know how he could feed so many persons. The Bhaktraj understood the difficulty of Kala and spoke, "Kala, do not be perplexed. Cover up with a piece of cloth the vessel which contains sweetmeat and sev. Then light a lamp with ghee and then begin to serve all. No body is to be allowed to go away without food.

Who can have any distrust in the words of the Bhaktraj ? Food began to be served and

300 men were fed. After feeding these 300 men, the Bhaktraj sat down to take food with Kala, his wife, and Govind. All ate with great ease.

Kala Raiyani again and again bowed to the Bhaktraj being overjoyed and said, "Bapa, I did well in making Govind your disciple. Otherwise, my life would have been ruined today." The Bhaktraj replied, "Kala, this is all due to Ram's Grace. How can Ram like to see my only disciple going away in this way? The Bhaktraj then addressed Govind, saying, "Govind, you did well in not allowing any one to go without taking food. You are my sincere devotee." The Bhaktraj then gave his blessing to Govind and returned to his Ashram.

The descendants of Govind are the devotees of the Bhaktraj. Out of their income, they send Bapa's share to the Ashram.

Jalaramji was now widely known as a "Sidhpurush."

V

UPS AND DOWNS OF LIFE.

Though the Bhaktraj came to be known as a 'Siddhpurush,' he had to experience the ups and downs of life. He had to incur debts to maintain the Annakshetra and to swallow the bitter words of the creditors. The Bhaktraj, however, was not to be shaken by any such vicissitudes.

He was getting help from several States. His reputation was high. He had a large number of sincere devotees. Nothing, however, could tempt his mind and he remained aloof from worldly happiness.

The Bhaktraj suffered several calamities in his life-time. The worst of all the calamaties was the difficulty about getting foodgrains for the Annakshetra during the famine of St. year 1934. Similar difficulties might have been experienced by the Bhaktraj before this also.

On one such time of distress, the Bhaktraj borrowed some rupees from Ravji Khoja of Virpur. Once upon a time when the Bhaktraj had finished the work of feeding the saints and was about to sit down to take his meals, Ravji Khoja came to the Ashram to collect his dues and said. to the Bhaktraj, "I order you under the name of Ram not to take food before repaying me the sum of Rs. 200/- which is due to me." As Ravji gave order under the name of "Ram" the Bhaktraj could not take a morsel of food. He at once got up leaving aside the served dish and told Ravji "Brother, I have not got at present the amount due to you but I am going on "travel" after about 15 days and at that time, I shall return your money by the grace of God." Ravji did not agree to this promise and demanded his money on the spot.

The Bhagat thereupon went to the Bazar and requested one merchant to lend him Rs. 200/-. The merchant explained that he had no ready money to lend but he would arrange to give the loan after some days. The Bhagat replied that the amount was required there and then. The Bhaktraj then went to the Darbargadh and sent word to the Thakore Saheb that Jala Bhagat wanted to see him. When the Thakore Saheb heard that the Bhaktraj wanted to see him, he at once came out of the Darbargadh and welcomed the Bhagat, saying, "O Bhagat what brings you here at midday ?" Jalaram explained his difficulty and requested the Thakore Saheb to gave him Rs. 200/-. The Thakore Saheb immediately paid

Rs. 200/- to the Bhaktraj. The Bhagat then went to the Bazar at the shop of one Lohana merchant, sent for Ravji Khoja and paid him Rs. 200/-. While paying the amount, the Bhaktraj said, "Ravjibhai, I am paying you the full amount of Rs. 200/- as claimed by you. I do not ask you to accept anything less but you will be justified in taking a profit of only one anna in a rupee." Ravajibhai replied, "Bhagat I have charged profit at the rate of one anna in a rupee and I have not charged more than that. If you so desire, I am ready to prove it." When this conversation was taking place, a mouse passed by that place. The Bhagat said, "Brother, no proof is required. The mouse which just passed from here has also "Ram" in her and I give you money in her presence. So saying, the Bhagat took leave bidding farewell to Ravjibhai and returned to the Ashram. He took his food at about 4 p. m.

There were neither electric lights nor hurricane lanterns in those days. Crude earthen saucer contained oil and cotton wicks were placed into them and lighted. These served as lamps.

It was about 2 O'clock at night. Ravjibhai was sleeping at his house at ease after having received Rs. 200/- from "Bapa" with mouse as a witness. At that time, one mouse took a burning wick from the earthen cup holding oil and wick for a light and placed the wick in the stock of cloth in the cloth shop of Ravjibhai. In no time, the fire broke out and the entire cloth, all the goods and shop were burnt to ashes.

After this incident, Ravjibhai repented much and said that he reaped the fruits of giving order to the Bhagat under the name of "Ram" and of incurring Bhagat's displeasure. Ravjibhai remained unhappy till his life and died heirless.

A different kind of incident is also narrated about the last days of Bhaktraj in St. 1934.

In St. 1934, there was a severe famine both in Gujarat and Kathiawar. It was difficult to obtain food grains and sadhus and mendicants began to come to the Annakshetra in crowds.

The Bhaktraj was giving food grains freely and used to send food grains to the places from which the demand came, not thinking that the stock would be exhausted in his Ashram. But in doing so, the Bhaktraj had often to purchase grains and the purchased went so high that the Ashram had to incur debts and even after incurring debts, it became difficult to cope with the situation.

On one occasion, the Bhaktraj went to Thana Galol. Patel Jivraj Vadalia, a staunch devotee of the Bhaktraj resided there and the Bhaktraj put up at his house. The Patel was very much pleased at Bapa's arrival at his house and he welcomed the Bhagat heartily. At night, when it was time to go to bed, the Bhagat asked, "What is the position about food grains?" Patel Jivraj replied, "Bapa, I have pulled on till now by selling away ornaments and other valuables of my wife and children. But I am now tired. There is no grain in the house and I have now no means to purchase food grains."

"Well Brother", replied the Bhaktraj, I had come to borrow Rs. 200/- from you but when your condition is so very bad, I shall not trouble you. I shall drop the idea of borrowing money from you."

The Patel replied, "Bapa, I shall sell my wife and children but I cannot refuse your request. "So saying, the Patel went to the cattle-shed and dug out an earthen pot from there. He placed the pot before the Bhaktraj and said, "Bapa, whatever money is contained in this is yours. This is all I have, and I place it at your disposal."

The Bhaktraj took out the money from the pot and on counting, the amount was found to be Rs. 200/-. At this time, the wife of Patel Jivraj came there and when she saw that the money was given to the Bhaktraj, she began to grieve. She began to think that there was no grain in the house and no more ornaments were in the house for sale and how did her husband find this sum to be given to the Bhaktraj. She did not get any sleep at night being engrossed in this thought. In the morning, the Bhaktraj left for Virpur with the money. The Patel's wife began to rebuke her husband. The Patel said, "Bapa's request cannot be refused. Bapa, will return the money within a fortnight." The Patel's wife however insisted that he shonld go to Virpur at that very moment and get back the amouut.

The Patel however did not heed to this insistence of his wife. After about 15 days, the Bhaktraj again came to Thana Galol and put up at the Patel's house. On seeing the Bhaktraj, the Patel's wife was annoyed and she thought that the Bhaktraj would ask for more money. But to her astonishment, the Bhaktraj returned to the Patel the amount which he had taken away as loan.

The Patel's wife was pleased to see that the Bhaktraj repaid the money. She thought that she would now be able to pass through the famine year by purchasing food grains from the amount returned by the Bhaktraj.

At night, the Bapa offered prayers at the house of the Patel and in the morning, the Bapa took leave from the Patel to return to Virpur.

The Patel entreated Bapa to stay for some time more but Bapa said, "I want to reach Virpur." So saying, Bapa started for going to Virpur. While starting he told the Patel, "Well, Patel, where is your store-room? Let me see it." So saying, the Bhaktraj went in the store-room of the Patel's house and touching the empty earthen jars with his stick, he said, "O Patel, Is it not that this Jar contains wheat and the other Bajri?" The Bhaktraj then touched all the earthen jars with his stick and said, "Do not open the upper mouths of these jars. Take out whatever is required from the bottom-holes of these jars." Bapa then left Patel's house and the Patel began to think as to how the Bhaktraj spoke like that, though the jars were empty. The Patel then approached one of the jars and opened the bottom hole and wheat began to come out of it. The Patel at once realized the situation. The Patel's wife then came there and the Patel told his wife, "Well, you were abusing the Bhaktraj but by his grace, all our jars are now full of food grains. The Patel's wife then assured herself and found that the jars were full with food grains. Her joy knew no bounds. With folded hands she began to pray, "O Jalaram, forgive me, and parden us for ill-considered words."

The whole famine year passed away and the whole family of the Patel passed the year with great pleasure without any difficulty. The Patel helped also many other poor people but his jars remained full. One day the Patel's wife opened the upper mouths of the jars and so, everything was over. The jars were found to be quite empty.

VI

IN TUNE WITH INFINITE.

The Maharaj Saheb of Gondal was so much pleased with devotion and saintly character of the Bhaktraj that he requested the Bhaktraj to settle in Gondal. He also offered land, Ashram, Temple and village and giras to the Bhaktraj but why should a saint like Jalaram leave Virpur? Ultimately, the Maharaja Saheb started another 'sadavrat' in the name of Bhaktraj at village Charakhdi. The sadhus and saints received Chappati and lentils in the Annakshetra at Virpur while they were given rice at Charakhdi. Due to some circumstances Annakshetra at Charakhdi had been closed by Bhakta Shri Hariramji Maharaj and still it is closed.

The ruling princes and chiefs and all saints of those days knew about the divine powers of the Bhaktraj and about the favour of "Goddess of Plenty" on the Bhaktraj. In times of necessity, they approached the Bhaktraj for relief.

In Samvat 1901-2 it was given out that the life time of Maharaj Jam Saheb Shri Ranmalji was short and that he must perform some good and charitable act.

At that time, one famous saint, Morarsaheb resided in Jam-Khambhalia. The Jam Saheb consulted this saint Morar Saheb and asked for his advice and requested him to show the ways and means by which his life could be prolonged. Morar Saheb said, that life could be prolonged if blessings of saints and sadhus were obtained and he accordingly advised the Jam Saheb to hold a religious fair (ધર્મ મેળો). It was thereupon decided to hold such a fair.

Invitations were sent to thousands of Saints, Sadhumaharajas, celebrates and devotees and Saint Jalaram was also invited on this occassion.

When the fair was held and all had assembled, Morarsaheb said "According to astrologer's calculation the life time of Jam Saheb is short and the Jam Saheb wishes to prolong his life by obtaining blessings of Saints and Sadhus. Though astrological predictions are believed to be true, there is at the same time a very great force in the blessings given by Saints. So all of your may please give your blessings."

In response to this appeal, all the Saints who were assembled there got up and offered prayers to God wishing for long life of the Jam Saheb. The Jam Saheb then gave presents and money in charity to all and also distributed clothes. At this time, it so happened that the number of clothes was small while the number of Saints was very great. The Jam Saheb was therefore perplexed and he informed Morar Saheb about the situation. Morar Saheb told the Jam Saheb that there was no cause for anxiety. Bhaktraj Jalaram of Virpur has come and the work of distribution of clothes may be given to him. The Jam Saheb thereupon requested Jalaramji to distribute the clothes and Bhaktraj distributed the clothes freely. No shortage of clothes was felt and all were satisfied. On seeing this miracle, the Jam Saheb bowed and paid his respect at the feet of Jalaramji.

Similar incident happened in Samvat 1928 also. The Kathi Darbars of Jetpur had robbed the Dana Bhagat's temple at Chalala. Shree Deva Bhakta who was the head of that temple at that time gave a curse to the Kathi Darbars that they would all die heirless.

The curse began to have its effect and out of 18 Bhagdars of Jetpur, six died one after another without leaving any issue. The Kathi Darbars saw that the curse would have its effect and all would die heirless. They therefore approached Deva Bhagat at Chalala and entreated him to be kind enough to revoke the curse. Deva Bhagat's saintly mind was moved and he felt pity. He said, "Call Jalaram of

Virpur on the eighth day from today and I shall also come and then the curse will be revoked."

As settled, both Deva Bhagat and Jalaram met at Jetpur on the eighth day. News spread round that both these saints have assembled to remove the curse. On hearing the strange news, about 400 to 500 Kathi Darbars and other came to Jetpur.

Arrangements were made to feed all at noon. The Kathi Darbars of Jetpur were under the belief that about 25 to 50 persons would be assembled, but actually the number of Kathi Darbars alone amounted to 400 to 500 men.

When it was time for meals, Deva Bhagat ordered that all might be asked to sit for meals. Nobody could disregard Bhagat's wishes and so all set down for meals. The Kathi Darbars were preplexed but they could not say anything as they were afraid of Deva Bhagat. Deva Bagat then said that milk may also be served as Kathi's dinners cannot be without milk. The Khathi Darbars were very much perplexed. The quantity of milk was so small that it might hardly be sufficient for 25-50 persons while here, a very large number of the men was taking their dinner. At this time, Deva Bhagat said, "There is no necessity to be perplexed. Bring out the pitcher containing milk." When the pitcher was brought, Deva Bhagat, with folded hands, requested Jala Bhagat to serve milk. Jala Bhagat immediately took the pitcher in hand and taking God's name, he at first served milk to Dewa Bhagat and then from the same pitcher, he filled up 400 cups of milk of one seer each and gave one cup to each of all who were sitting for dinner. None was left out. Jala Bhagat went to the kitchen for returning the pitcher. Seeing this miracle all were surprised.

In the evening, all assembled and Deva Bhagat gave the following sermon to the Kathis, "Darbars, henceforward, do not harass the poor. Lead honest life, do not be dishonest. God will preserve your prestige. I am residing at some distance, but there is Jala Bhagat in you neighbourhood. He is powerful and you have all seen his Divine power this morning. So all of you be wise and lead a virtuous life." The meeting then dispersed. The curse was removed and since then, the Kathi Darbars were fortunate to have issue. Even at present, the Kathi Darbars of Jetpur pay annuities to the Jala Bhagat's Ashram at Virpur.

Bhaktraj Jalaram performed many such miracles. He fulfilled the wishes of his devotees. There are many instances in which he fed many people out of the small quantity of food cooked for a few men only.

The Bhaktraj had fed 60 men out of a large flat circular vessel of wood which contained food for ten only, at the house of Jutha Bhagat of Amreli. The descendents of Jutha Bhagat. believe this vessel (Kathrot) as a cornucopia and preserve it as a valuable present. Whenever there is some occasion, cooked food is put in this vessel and then it is served. The food suffices for all who are dining. This vessel is at present with Sheth Dullabhji Ramji of Amreli.

The Bhaktraj treated Galalbai, mother of Gora Bharvad of Virpur, as his sister and Galalbai used to address the Bhaktraj as "Jalabhai."

The Bhaktraj suffered from piles. Virbai, the wife of the Bhaktraj died on Kartak Vad 9th of Samvat 1935. After this, the Bhaktraj's disease of piles was on the increase. In the month of Vaisakh of Samvat 1936, the disease took a very serious turn. Galalbai came daily to inquire about the health of the Bhaktraj. She nursed him as a sister. The disease reached its highest stage in Kartak of St. 1937. Thousands of men came to the Ashram for Darshan. These people felt that these were the last days of the Bhaktraj. One day, Shri Bhimji Virji, retired Karbhari of Virpur who was a staunch devotee of the Bhaktraj approached him and said, "Maharaj, my daughter is to be married in the month of Magser and I shall consider myself much obliged if you will kindly grace the occasion by your presence.

The Bhaktraj replied, "Karbhari saheb, body is perishable but there will be no difficulty on the occasion at your house. Nothing can be said after the sun gets into southern declination." Bhimjibhai was very sorry to hear this and tears fell from his eyes. The Bhaktraj consoled him and said, "Brother, why do you become so sorry. I understand what you have to say."

Then the Bhaktraj referred to Hariram and said, "The Almighty God is the helper of Hariram. No one should therefore keep any anxiety on that score."

The month of Maha approached and the Bhaktraj's disease grew more virulent. Galalbai was nursing the Bhaktraj day and night. One day, she received an invitation from her brother Rupabhai to go to Umrali. Galalbai did not like to leave the Bhaktraj in his failing health but it was equally difficult to refuse the invitation. On one hand, there was brother religionist and on the other there was full brother. Galalbai told Bhaktraj, "Brother, I have received an invitation from my Brother Rupabhai at Umrali. May I go for a night?" The Bhaktraj replied "Well, go, but do not stay there for more than one night."

After taking permission, Galalbai went to Umrali which is situated at a distance of 12 miles from Virpur. She stayed there for one night. The next morning she was preparing herself to return to Virpur. Her brother entreated her to stay for a day more. Galalbai could not refuse her brother's request and stayed there for one day more.

It was tenth day of Maha Vad. Galalbai was returning from Umrali to Virpur on the third day. When she reached a place on the way about 2 miles from Virpur, she saw Jalaram approaching her with an earthen jar containing water. He gave her cold water to drink, and he called Kacharbhai Dobaria who was picking up cotton plant stems in the nighbouring field and talked with him. This happened about 4 O'clock in the evening. All the three then started towards Virpur. When all of them had walked about I mile, the Bhaktraj said," you follow slowly. I am going ahead as sadhus might have come in the Ashram." So saying, the Bhaktraj began to walk fast and he eluded Kachrabhai and Galalbai.

When Galalbai and Kachrabhai reached Virpur, they saw the funeral pile burning in the Burning Ground. One man told Galalbai that Jala Bhagat had passed away.

Kachrabhai and Galalbai were wonderstruck at the news. Galalbai now realised why Jalaram had asked her to stay at Umrali for one night only. But it was too late. She grieved much, but the Bhaktraj had already reached his heavenly abode.

On the other hand, Tiliyo who was always reviling the Bhaktraj was returning from Jetpur to Virpur. The Bhaktraj met him on the way sitting in a royal pompous carriage. Each other exchanged good wishes and then the Bhaktraj said, "Tiliya I promised you to inform you when the celestial selfmoving chariot comes. The chariot has now come. Throw down the gunny bag which you are carrying on your shoulder and come in the chariot." But Tiliya thought that the Bhaktraj was merely joking. He replied. "Bhagat, how can there be such a chariot? You go alone. Some Ruling Prince seems to have sent for you and you are joking me." The Bhaktraj replied, "Tiliya, I am not joking." But the unlucky Tiliya continued to believe this as a joke only. He replied to the Bhaktraj, in a jocular tone." Bhaktraj, you go alone, Are you not ashamed of talking of celestial chariot while actually you are sitting in some Durbar's carriage. ?" The carriage passed away and as Tiliya reached Virpur, a crowd of mourners met him. Some one said, Tiliya, Jalaram has gone to heaven." For a moment, Tiliya did not understand what was happening but he then realized at once that the

Bhaktraj had fulfilled his promise and that the Bhaktraj went to the heaven in a chariot and he was left out.

Tiliyo began to bewail. The people of the village were astonished at sorrow felt by Tiliyo who was always mocking the Bhaktraj.

After some time when Tiliya's sorrow abated, he told all what had happened on the way and he began to repent for his want of faith.

The Bhaktraj thus passed away on Maha Vad 10th of Samvat 1937.

VII

BHAGAT SHRI HARIRAMJI AND GIRDHARRAMJI

Bhakta Shri Jalaram started the Annakshetra when he was only 20 years of age. The Almighty God tested Jalaramji's saintliness by asking for the services of his wife Virbai when he was only 30 years of age. After this incident, Bhaktraj Jalaramji observed celebacy till his life. Before dedication of Virbai to God, she had given birth to a daughter. The daughter was named "Jamnabai." Jamnabai was married to Bhaktiram, a Bhakta of Kotda Pitha. She had given birth to a son who was named "Kalabhai." This Kalabhai was a saintly man and he was residing with Bhakta Shri Jalaramji at Virpur. Kalabhai had a son named "Hariramji."

Coming events cast their shadows before and Hariram was found to be clever, God-loving and kind from his childhood. Saint Shri Jalaramji was contemplating that Hariramji should succeed him but he kept this matter to himself and did not disclose it to anybody. As time passed, Hariramji showed signs of possessing high virtues and Jalaramji thought that Hariramji would keep up the prestige and reputation of the Ashram.

One day, when Hariramji was about 12 years of age, he was going to school. Jalaramji called Hariramji and asked him as to where he was going. Hariramji replied that he was going to school. Jalaramji said, "Well, Hari, come near me." When Hariramji approached Jalaram, the latter placed some "Prasad" from his mouth in the mouth of Hariram and gave his blessing saying" It is no longer necessary for you to go to School. Be prosperous and happy."

After this event, Hariram got inspiration. This blessing wonderfully developed Hariram's mental abilities. Though taught at a village school, he was intimately acquainted with Ramayan, Mahabharat, and other scriptures and he used to discuss scriptures with learned Pandits. Virtues spread their influence in all directions at all times and Hariramji had a great reputation among the chiefs and Ruling princes of the neighbourhood. Several chiefs used to come to Virpur to take advice from Hariramji.

Hariramji wrote many books on religion and his book on "Importance of charitable distribution of foodgrains and duties of Bhakta." is worth reading.

After the death of Bhakta Shri Jalaramji, Hariramji succeeded him on Friday, Falgun Sud 7th of Samvat 1937.

At this time, Namdar Thakore Saheb Shri Sursinhji was on the throne of Virpur. He had a very high regard for the Bhaktraj. On this occasion, he said that Bhakta Jalaramji had made Virpur famous and known everywhere. It was due to Bhaktraj Jalaramji that Virpur came to be known as "Jala Bhagat's Virpur," and the Thakore Saheb was very proud to find that his capital place Virpur had become so much famous. It was also very gratifying for the state that such a saint was born at Virpur. The Thakore Saheb was very much pleased when Hariramji successed to the Gadi of Jalaramji and he presented Hariramji with "Poshak."

When Bhaktraj Shri Jalaramji passed away, there was some debt on the Ashram. Still however, Bhakta Shri Hariramji invited a large number of saints and sadhus etc., at a fair on the death of Bhakta Shri Jalaram and spent about 25 to 30 thousand Rupees in feeding the saints and sadhus who assembled there on the occasion. About one lac sadhus and saints had assembled at this fair.

In this assemblage, one great saint arrived and after bowing to the saints etc., who had assembled, he went into the store room of the Ashram. This saint had a very nice personality and he was robust and healthy. He brought one sweetball from the storeroom and after breaking the sweetball into small pieces, he threw the pieces in all directions and said, "Let storeroom be inexhaustible." After giving this blessing, the saint left the fair.

Many men went after this saint, but he disappeared and none found him. Many learned people said that Bhakta Shri Jalaram had come in the guise of Saint. Others said that Almighty God himself had appeared in the guise of the saint.

The fair held on the death of Bhakta Shri Jalaramji was unique and unparallel in this iron age. Namdar Thakore Saheb Suraji of Virpur guarded this fair for 3 days on horseback.

In St. 1953, Bhakta Hariramji called several leading persons from Rajkot to discuss the question about starting "Lohana Boarding" in Rajkot and it is due to those efforts that there exists today a "Lohana Boarding" in Rajkot.

On Ashad Vadi first of St. 1968, Bhakta Hariramji started on a pilgrimage with a small party and while on pilgrimage, he died of cholera at Mathura on "Shravan Sud Ninth."

As was predicted by Jalaramji, Hariramji kept up the high prestige and reputation of Jalaramji's Ashram and also added considerably to the fame of Jalabapa.

Bhakta Shri Hariramji and the then Yuvraj Saheb Hamirsinhji of Virpur were on very intimate and brotherly terms with each other. When

Hamirsinhji Saheb received a telegram about the sudden death of Bhakta Shri Hariramji at Mathura, he did not believe it. He sent his faithful servant to Mathura and when the servant wired that Bhakta Shri Hariramji had died of cholera attack having undergone the attack for about 5 to 6 hours only, he was very sorry to hear the news. Yuvraj Shri Hamirsinhji at once made arrangements for proper care of the children of Bhakta Shri Hariramji who were all minors and took the steps for the education of the children.

Shri Hariramji left behind him one daughter and two sons. The daughter has passed away. The elder son Girdharramji is at present on the Gadi, and the younger son Vrajlal is helping in the management of the Ashram.

Bhakta Shri Girdharramji was born on Magsar Sud 8th of St. 1961. It is not possible to succeed to the Gadi of saint Shree Jalaram without righteous past life and Bhakta Shri Girdharramji is keeping up the high ideals and traditions of the Ashram. He continues free distribution of foodgrains to the saints and sadhus as before and though the present times are hard, he is maintaining the work of free distribution of food to the needy as if this was his life goal. In addition to free distribution of foodgrains, Bhakta Shri Girdharramji is often helping the needy by giving them their desired object according to the best of his abilities.

As a result of the supernatural powers of Jala Bapa, about 25 to 50, men and women daily come to the Ashram by rail, road or car to pay their homage to Jala Bapa and to fulfil their vows. Bhakta Shri Girdharramji with all love and sincerity arranges to feed these people, supply them with tea etc and give necessary residential accommodation in the Ashram of Jala Bapa. The guests who come for Darshan and fulfilling their vows find hearty welcome at the Ashram.

Samvat 1996 was a famine year in Kathiawar (Saurashtra) and Bhakta Shri Girdharramji continued charitable distribution of food to the needy without making any distinction about caste or creed. As a result of this, the Thakore Saheb Shri Dilipsinhji of Virpur held a Darbar and gave the title of "Dharmamurti" to Bhakta Shri Girdharramji.

Bhakta Shri Girdharramji has got three sons and three daughters. The eldest son Jesukhramji having completed his studies helps Bhakta Girdharramji in the management of the Ashram and in looking after the needs and convenience of the guests who visit the Ashram. The two younger sons are still studying.

Virpur is situated between Rajkot and Junagadh and the saints and sadhus from throughout

India, while going on pilgrimage to Prabhas Patan, Girnar or Sudama Puri, visit Virpur and they are all supplied with food at the Ashram.

Bhakta Shri Girdharramji has added considerably to the good names of his ancestors and devotees from Bombay, Ahmedabad, Surat and other places of Gujrat and Saurashtra and also from small and big cities of Africa are attracted to the Ashram. In the holy and noble cause of free food distribution, the wife of Bhaktraj is a great help to him in his daily work.

Matushri Jaya Laxmima is religious minded and believes in service and in the good cause of the Annakshetra. She too, is arranging about feeding the guests who visit the Ashram and obtains their blessings.

These three holy souls, Bhakta Shri Girdharramji, Matushri Jaya Lakhmima and Jesukhramji Maharaj are serving the saints and sadhus in the Ashram which remains full of "Bhakti"

The writer of this book very sincerely requests the devotees and believers to come to have Darshan of "Joli and Dhoka" at Virpur at the Ashram of great saint Jala Bapa, the taking of whose name in this iron age works miracles and there are thousands of instances in which the vows taken in his name are fulfilled.

Virpur is situated in the Madhya Saurashtra District and is a Railway station at a distance of 36 miles from Rajkot. Those who come from Bombay and foreign countries have to change the train at Viramgam and from Viramgam, they have to travel by the metre gauge Railway running from Viramgam to Veraval and Virpur is a Railway Station on this Viramgam- Veraval line, between Gondal and Jetpur.

Shobhagchand Mangalji Rajdev
Champa Kunj,
42 Prahlad Plot,
Rajkot.
(Saurashtra)

"JAI JALARAM"

Dated 10-7-52.

Dear Reader,

This is written to express deep gratitude that I am indebted to "Bhagat Jalaram Bapu." The miracle that took place has convinced me to the very core of my soul that in the worship of Bhagat Jalaram Bapu I achieved the goal of my ambition which once appeared to be nothing short of impossibility.

There was a moment in my life when I could not see into the distant further and the awe that had then prevailed made me believe hideous results. It was then that through the kind courtsey of Mrs. Desai that a dim light of hope was ignited in my heart that was full of fears and worries. My blind faith in Bhagat Jalaram Bapu glowed the flame more and more, and I could immediately feel that a consolation that can be felt only through the aid of divine power. Days passed into weeks and weeks shaped into months. But these were barely few months, when one morning like a bolt from the blue my eyes read the news of the fulfilment of my first wish. A few days of anxious moments again intervened and my ship of career seemed to have been lost in a water whirl. But once again my conscience rose to the occasion and sought help of Bhagat Jalaram Bapu. The results achieved were so astonishing that even at this stage, I could hardly believe the reality. But facts are facts and my second desire has also been fulfilled.

These few lines are written not as a testimony, for it is impossible for an earthly creature-to do so, but this is spontaneous inner voice that sought vent.

E. R. Shroff
A greatful devotee of
Bhagat Jalaram Bapu.

" JAI JALARAM "

I put post-script to what my friend Shroff has very realistically said.

When the future appeared the darkest he prayed that (1) he may be confirmed as Class one officer on Govt. of India Railways and (2) he may be transferred to Bombay as D.M.E. in the senior scale.

Both these wishes were granted. He is confirmed class one officer and transferred as D.M.E. Hq. Bombay Region.

In another case a young man turned mad and violent caused anxiety to his relatives who prayed to Jala Bapa that should this young man be sane make his own living, two beatle nuts would be presented to Jala Bapa. To the surprise of every one, the young man is still earning his own living and shows no sign of insanity.

My own personal experience of Jala Bapa's miracle. I was suffering from diabities, I tried all means but nothing could effect a cure. I left things to Jala Bapa and the miracle happened, Doctors testified by careful examination that I had no diabities. I then got my teeth pulled out without any ill effects even though there were dietary restrictions.

There are numerous examples of faith in Jala Bapa rewarded. Thanks my wife's faith in Jala Bapa. Every one in the family is Jala Bapa's devotee, My son-in-law had his wishes granted. When further looked gloomy, Jala Bapa assured us of better days ahead.

Apart from other things, everyone is invited to experience the unique peace and calm one feels in presence of Jala Bapa.

N. S. Desai.
Virpur 10-7-52. D. T. S. Hq.
Western Railway, Gondal.

JAI JALARAM.